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LISZT AS LIEDER COMPOSER

By EDWIN HUGHES

DURING the fifties of the last century, Richard Wagner addressed the following letter, among many others, to Franz Liszt:

Let me first of all tell you, best of all men on earth, how astounded I am at your enormous productiveness! When I look back over your activities during the past years, you seem to me simply superhuman. I marvel how you can create so much and I realize your enviable position. I think I have discovered the fact that you are the greatest musician of all times!

How profound you are! I realize more and more that you are really a great philosopher. While I was reading Schopenhauer I was nearly the whole time with you. Your own thoughts I have rediscovered there in wonderful likeness. Even if you express yourself differently, because of your religious nature, I still know that it is the same thing which you mean. You are to me such an astounding personality, that I know of no other appearance in the whole province of art or life with whom I can in any way compare you.

To-day came the second part of your Symphonic poems; they give me such a sudden feeling of opulence that I can hardly control myself. Each day I read over one or the other of the scores, just as I would read a poem, quite freely and unhampered. And every time I have the feeling that I have been immersed in a deep, crystal flood, quite by myself, the whole world left behind, living for an hour my own real life. Then I emerge, refreshed and strengthened, and wishing that I might be with you. . . .

Perhaps there are very few even among the most ardent of Liszt's champions to-day who would care to go as far as Wagner in assigning to Liszt his place upon the Olympian heights. From a purely human viewpoint, however, Liszt certainly was the most splendid figure that has yet appeared in the history of the art of tone.

When in 1848, after his incomparable career as virtuoso, the inner necessity of giving to the world the expression of his personality in a more lasting form caused his withdrawal to the quiet precincts of Weimar in order that he might devote his whole attention to composition, he took with him little presentiment of the reception which was to be accorded to this deeper unfolding

of his genius among the very people who had showered on him the most frenzied ovations during his wide-flung concert tournées. The world of music knew Liszt as the greatest piano virtuoso of all times, and it did not want to know him in any other rôle, least of all in that of the serious creator of serious musical works. The unequalled power and beauty of his performances, quite as magical from an interpretative as from a technical standpoint, had completely upset all previous notions of the possibilities of piano playing. At the same time that he was writing his scintillating operatic transcriptions and his fiery Hungarian Rhapsodies, he was championing all that was deepest and finest in the piano-forte literature, making popular in the best sense of the word the Beethoven Sonatas and Concertos, the daring flights of the young Chopin, and, through his "genial" transcriptions, the mighty organ creations of Bach.

The above mentioned attitude of the musical public of Europe towards Liszt the composer still exists to a very marked degree, particularly in German Europe. There can be no doubt that Liszt's dazzling success as a virtuoso worked long after his death through the power of suggestion and still keeps a great number of very estimable musical persons from believing that anything of lasting worth could have come from the pen of Liszt the creative artist. It is as though these same persons should reject the plays of Shakespeare or Molière because the authors happened to have been actors by profession.

Liszt was perhaps always a little too much a man of the world for genuine German musical taste. In spite of the fact that his serious works practically all belong to the domain of German music, there was still something exotic about him to the average German music-lover. Although born of a German mother, he was nevertheless a native of Hungary, had given a good deal of his attention at one period to an earnest study of Gypsy music, a subject always very near his heart, and had even made an attempt to introduce the tonal idiom of the *puszta* into serious West-European music. In addition, he had spent the impressionable years of his youth in Paris, he spoke French by preference and wrote nearly everything for publication in that language. Then again his connection with the Catholic Church had drawn him southward to Rome for more or less extended periods and he had imbibed Italian culture, both secular and religious, to a marked extent.

The series of important musical creations which came from Liszt's pen after his retirement to Weimar were, a great part of

them, as revolutionary in form as they were in musical content. Besides inventing a completely new manner of composition in the Symphonic Poem, he developed chromatic modulation to a hitherto unheard-of point, and introduced a novel and peculiarly expressive use of the suspension, the latter becoming an unmistakable and distinctive characteristic of his compositions. To the rich feast of musical ideas which Liszt spread out during the few years after his retirement from the concert platform, Wagner in particular helped himself right and left. The appearance of Liszt's Symphonic Poems and that memorable visit of their composer to Zurich, of which Wagner writes in his autobiography, when Liszt played many of his new works to a marvelling group of listeners at Wagner's house, had the effect of giving an entirely new direction to the musical manner of the creator of modern German opera. A letter from Wagner to Bülow from Paris, dated October 7th, 1859, contains the following confession: "There are many things that we gladly own up to among ourselves, for example, the fact that since my acquaintance with Liszt's compositions I have become, harmonically, an entirely different person than I was before." For those who still refuse to be convinced by the material proofs at hand, this frank admission of Wagner himself should remove all further doubts as to the matter. The musical ancestry of the *Ring* operas and of *Tristan* is to be sought for not in *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser* and *The Flying Dutchman*, but in the tone poems, the symphonies and the greater piano works of Liszt.

Liszt is, on the other hand, one of the few composers whom it is difficult to accuse of having "stolen" musical ideas or musical styles from either his contemporaries or his predecessors. Although his musical relationship to those other two romanticists, Schubert and Berlioz, is not to be denied, I can recall scarcely anything in all his original compositions which seems to have been borrowed, consciously or sub-consciously, from some other composer. The single exception in which he deliberately adopted a form created by another may be found perhaps in the great B minor Ballade, which is based on the Chopin models. He is in fact one of the most original geniuses of the art. Even his more youthful compositions, trivial as some of them are, have at least the stamp of originality. In 1829-30, about the time when Wagner was writing his opus 1, the Sonata for piano in B flat, a work entirely based on the models of Mozart and Haydn, Liszt was busy with the sketches for a great "Revolutionary Symphony." The principal theme of the *Adagio* of this never-

completed work was used later by Liszt as the melodic basis of his symphonic poem *Héroïde funèbre*. It is easy to see then which of these two composers was the first to wander into new realms of discovery.

The new works which Liszt gave to the world about the middle of the last century did not at all lack their propaganda and their propagandists. But before these compositions had succeeded in making for themselves a perfectly secure place in German musical life, there appeared on the northern horizon a star of the first magnitude, no other than Johannes Brahms of Hamburg, whose whole musical personality was as foreign as could be to the Neo-German manner of music-making. Contrary to the cosmopolitan Liszt, Brahms came as the most German of Germans to his own people. He looked askance at anything French during the whole period of his life, and even his love for travel in Italy left no apparent impression in his musical works. Hungary was the only land outside of his own Germanic soil which touched within him a sympathetic chord, and, strange to say, he and his antipode, Liszt, are the only two of all musical composers who have succeeded in producing lasting art works of importance in the modern Hungarian manner.

There was no mistaking Brahms' *Germanentum*. One look at him sufficed. A certain lack of the light, fluent hand, a certain ungracefulness in his creations, as in his personality, did not hinder in the least the recognition, at first in smaller, then in ever-widening circles, of his enormous musical potency. The lack of these particular qualities, in fact, rather endeared him to a nation which regards the possession of the qualities of grace, charm, facility, and the like to a high degree more as a sign of triviality in creative or even reproductive art, and as attributes merely decorative and not fundamental in character. A whole cult of musical purists, dissatisfied with the desertion by Liszt and Wagner of the classical forms, and predicting the downfall of the whole art of tone through the growth of such, to them, degenerate tendencies, found in Brahms a champion of traditional German music-making, a man who could with success use the old bottles for his new wine. Converts, many of them, from the Liszt-Wagner direction, they quickly acquired the taste for the somewhat austere Brahms idiom, and Bülow, son-in-law of Liszt, trumpeting forth his discovery of the Holy Ghost of the art, proclaimed himself high prophet of the cult, dosed his followers copiously with the new evangel and carried the propaganda far and wide. Joachim also, who owed so much to Liszt, was one of

the most active of the backsliders. In company with Brahms and a certain Julius Otto Grimm, he issued a public anathema against the whole Neo-German movement, in the shape of a pronunciamento of uncalled-for bitterness, and at the expense of his friend and benefactor, Liszt, succeeded in enormously strengthening his own position in Berlin. He exerted such a powerful influence on the faculty of the Hochschule für Musik, that even up to the present time pupils of that institution are taught to look upon Liszt's compositions as a delusion and a snare.

The Brahms movement was successful, and the result was that to this day a large portion of the self-chosen musical *intellectuals* will have none of Liszt, even at his most serious and deeply-felt moments. For them nothing of any particular musical importance happened during the interim between the Ninth Symphony and the appearance in print of Brahms' Sonata for Pianoforte in C. In spite of the fact, however, that Brahms has become the most popular musicians' musician in German Europe and that all true Brahmsites affect a fine scorn for anything in the Liszt-Wagner direction of music-making, the movement has not by any means succeeded in driving Liszt off the concert-platform. His compositions for orchestra and for piano exhibit a most vigorous and (for the Brahmsites) exasperating tendency to put in their appearance with undiminishing frequency wherever German music is produced. Even the all-Liszt piano-recital has the temerity to show its face on occasion.

All the more remarkable then is the fact that Liszt as a song-composer has suffered such an unbelievable neglect, when his *Lieder* belong without a doubt to the finest creations of the German Muse in this form. All the more remarkable, too, that these songs are so unjustly neglected in German Europe, for they are German *Lieder* through and through, as German as any of Schubert's or Schumann's in spite of the fact that their composer was the most cosmopolitan of all great creative musicians. In Germany you will find any number of young musicians who will tell you that they have never heard a Liszt song and who, some of them, probably do not even know that Liszt ever wrote such a thing as a song. Such is the case in music-saturated Germany, and it is not therefore very difficult to imagine that in America and England there are many singers of ability even, who are quite as ignorant of Liszt's achievements and of Liszt's importance as a song-composer, who perchance have never had these exceptional songs called to their attention and who do not know that Liszt wrote anything for the solo-voice except

perhaps *Es muss ein Wunderbares sein* and *Die Loreley*. In the long article in Grove's Dictionary on the development of song composition, the portion devoted to the German Lied contains not one single word about Liszt's achievements as song writer. Reason enough then for the present essay.

Anyone who pretends to an appreciation of the German *Lied* as a whole must of necessity possess more than a passing acquaintance with the Liszt songs, forming as they do the important connecting link between the songs of Schubert and Schumann and those of the later German composers. Liszt, at once the last of the romanticists and the first of the moderns, occupies as song-composer much the same position that he does in the field of orchestral composition. He who would seek the orchestral ancestry of Richard Strauss will find it in the Symphonic Poems and the two great Symphonies of Liszt, just as he will find in the Liszt songs the musical ancestry of the Neo-German *Lied*. Liszt's songs opened up entirely new perspectives in the art of song composition and pointed out the path upon which Hugo Wolf discovered even more distant and wonderful vistas and along which Richard Strauss and other modern German song-writers have achieved their successes. To the almost purely lyrical character of the *Lied* up to that time, Liszt added a new note, the dramatic, which had previously put in its appearance only in the ballad, and which Liszt now introduced on appropriate occasion and with remarkable effect in the musical settings of poems of other character as well.

If Liszt's Muse received any hints at all as to the direction which the new songs were to take, these came surely from Schubert. Of the Schumann songs there is not the slightest trace of an influence in those by Liszt, either in the melodic line or in the accompaniment. Schumann's accompaniments show little or no advance over those of the Schubert songs, and Schumann's manner of creating a rhythmic figure and then using it throughout the several verses of the poem as accompaniment finds no counterpart in the Liszt songs. Liszt, on the contrary, developed an entirely new type of accompaniment for a number of his songs, using the same method in miniature that he employed in such a wonderful manner on a large scale in his Symphonic Poems; namely, the invention of a short, pregnant motive of characteristic significance, and the alteration or metamorphosis of this motive, without the loss of its identity, to express the varying moods of the verse. *Es war ein König in Thule*, *Ich möchte hingehn* and *Die Fischerstochter* are examples of this treatment.

It was afterwards so developed by Hugo Wolf that in his songs one often finds the whole poem mirrored in the piano accompaniment to the extent that in many cases the accompaniment could be played very well as a solo, giving, as it does, a perfect mood-picture of the poetic subject. Not only Wolf, but many modern song-writers have added unto their possessions this, if the term may be allowed, symphonic form of accompaniment, which originated with Liszt.

Nowhere is there a trace of Liszt the piano virtuoso in his songs, but of Liszt the musician there is evidence on every side. Nowhere is there artificiality, nowhere bombastic effort. On the contrary, a directness, a wealth of musical ideas, often a simplicity almost Schubertesque. The melodic line is never distorted or obscured by an overloading of accompaniment, not even in the more elaborate songs. The introductions and postludes of the songs are short, as a rule, wonderfully expressive, and without any seeking after effect. How finely drawn, for example, are the prelude to *Die Loreley* and the postlude to *Die Drei Zigeuner*.

The moods of his songs are manifold and Liszt is at home in all of them. One thing only is not to be found in the songs or in any of Liszt's other works: humor. Fond as Liszt was of a joke in daily life, we do not find in his compositions that fresh, healthy humor of which Beethoven, Schumann and Hugo Wolf were such masters. Liszt's musical humor, when it does make its appearance, as in the *Mephisto Waltz* or in the last movement of the *Faust Symphony*, is always of the mephistophelean variety. On the other hand, no one has sounded the note of poignant grief in music more deeply than Liszt. As a counterpart to *Tasso*, *Funérailles* and the *Andante Lagrimoso* among his instrumental compositions, there are, among the songs, the *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca*, Goethe's *Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass* (the second setting) and de Musset's *Tristesse*, to mention only a few. The deeply-felt religious sentiment of several of the songs was without doubt genuine with Liszt, in spite of the fact that some of his detractors have endeavored to place Liszt in a false light with regard to this side of his character. The battle between his artistic and religious natures, which lasted with more or less violence during the whole of his life, makes itself manifest in his *Lieder* such as *Der Du von dem Himmel bist* and *Im Rhein*, not to mention the two songs of Joseph Müller, poet of the Mariencult, *Das Veilchen* and *Die Schlüsselblumen*, just as it does in the *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la Solitude*, the two St. Francis legends and other of his pianoforte compositions.

The composition of songs after the versewise pattern, as in the two weak Müller *Lieder*, occurs very seldom. When Liszt repeats the musical setting of the first strophe for the remaining verses, he usually introduces alterations toward the end and climax of the poem, as in Cornelius' *Wieder möcht' ich dir begegnen*. In such songs as *Die Loreley* and *Die drei Zigeuner* the manner of composition breaks away completely from all previous notions of form in song writing, and follows solely the poetic program of the verses. In these two songs there is no working with small motives even, and still there is no lack of unity in either. In fact, there is not present in any of his songs that certain structural loose-jointedness which is characteristic of and detrimental to many of Liszt's larger instrumental compositions. The student who compares the Liszt *Lied* with that of his forerunners will discover an intense intimacy between words and music which up to that time had existed to such a degree in the songs of no other composer, and it is this fact perhaps even more than Liszt's invention of the symphonic form of accompaniment which gives Liszt such an exalted position among song composers. Not that song writers before Liszt had failed to absorb themselves completely in the poetic content of the verses which they set to music, but with Liszt we first find in addition that detailed, subtle transmutation into tone of each finest lilt of meaning in the poetic line. It is on this point more than on any other that the close relationship of Hugo Wolf to Liszt rests. In the Brahms songs there is in the main a quite different conception of the art of song composing, one which overlooks completely the advances of the Neo-German style, contenting itself largely with the versewise pattern, the music seeking to reproduce the mood of the poem as a whole, rather than to enter into any detailed intimacy with each finely-felt turn of expression.

In his vocal works Liszt was quite free to compose program-music to his heart's content, even from the standpoint of the absolute-music fanatics, who may, however, in time evolve a form of vocal writing with pure vowel sounds, in order to do away completely with the distracting influence of the words. Who can tell? Liszt then, the father of modern program-music, was very much within his own particular domain as *Lieder* composer. I have the feeling, in fact, that Liszt never composed anything other than program-music, except perhaps the Sonata, the two Concertos, the Fantasia and Fugue on B-A-C-H, one or two of the *Études*, and the pieces in dance form.

As to the harmonic structure of the musical settings of the songs, there are of course on every hand the typical Liszt idioms: daring and frequent modulations, deliciously painful suspensions and passing notes (for those whose ears have not become too dulled by ultra-modern excruciations), and yet no utilization of these things for mere outward effect. The veiled tonality of some of the songs gives them an added charm, as does the ending on some other chord than the tonic triad, as the closing mood of the poem dictates. Liszt does not hesitate to alter the key signature half a dozen times during the course of a song if the changing mood of the verses makes it an artistic necessity. In the song *Ich möchte hingehn* there are seven changes of key signature. With alterations of the time signature Liszt is even more liberal in some cases; the same song shows no less than fifteen changes between the $\frac{4}{4}$ in which it begins and the $\frac{3}{4}$ in which it ends.

The dramatic character of many of the songs is heightened by a most effective use of the *fermata* and by the frequent introduction of *recitativo* passages, demanding a highly developed command of the art of vocal declamation on the part of the singer. The *fermata* finds employment in so many of the Liszt *Lieder* that it is quite superfluous to quote examples. In *Tristesse*, one of Liszt's finest efforts in song composition, the whole is kept largely in recitative character, with no attempt at sustained melody, a treatment which brings about just that dramatic intensity which the lines of de Musset's sonnet demand. As an example of these points the song is worthy of especial attention from the singer who wishes to become acquainted with Liszt in his most profound moments. The handling of the accompaniment is interesting and important enough to warrant a quotation or two at this point. Like angry curses against an inexorable fate is the beginning:



and the return later in the song of these short, anguished phrases below a C sharp organ point is an exceptionally fine moment. The postlude is quite heartrending. The wearily rising sequences, full of bitter tears, of futile longing, seek in vain a comforting

solution, and finally end despairingly on an unresolved discord, quite foreign to the tonalities of the piece.



Some of the songs exhibit that compositional weakness of Liszt, the occasional tiresome and unnecessary repetition of phrases without any alteration whatever, but not of course to the degree which this trait manifests itself in many of Liszt's instrumental compositions. There are many *ossia*, particularly in the later songs, proof of Liszt's continual striving towards a more perfect form of expression. As a rule the alterations are to be preferred to the original readings.

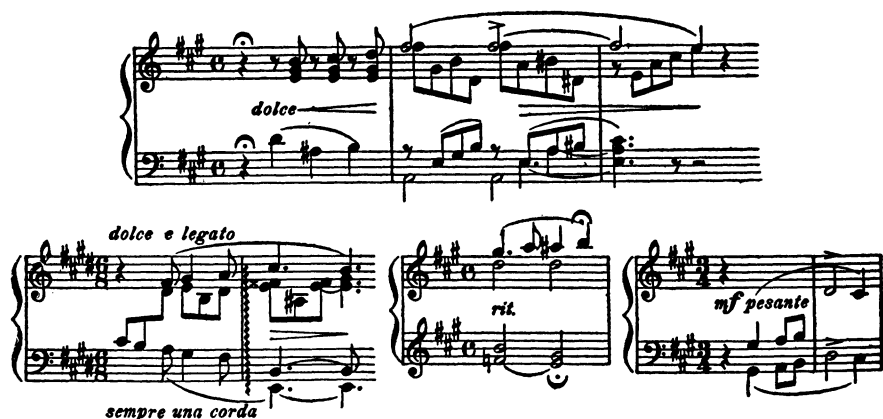
As an example of Liszt's use of a short, characteristic phrase after the symphonic manner to give musical cohesion to a work of somewhat larger dimensions than the average *Lied*, let us look at his setting of Herwegh's *Ich möchte hingehn*, one of the most difficult poems for musical composition which Liszt attempted. Its very length and the rapidly changing succession of mood-pictures which it presents would have placed impassable obstacles in the way of most composers. The fact that Liszt was able to make a success of it, to give unity to the many-hued fancies of the seven stanzas, is due largely to the symphonic style of the accompaniment, and is proof enough of the composer's past mastery of the art of song writing. The task was lightened by the fine inspiration of the brief, aspiring phrase with which the songs open, and which forms the *Leitmotiv* of the whole:



The opening phrase of the voice is built on this *Leitmotiv*,



which appears then in various garbs in the melodic line and the accompaniment, as the changing mood of the poem demands:



The next to the last example is a curious anticipation of the second half of the love-motive from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, in precisely the same tonality in which it first appears in the prelude to the music-drama, and note-true except for the fact that in the Wagner version the progression of the alto voice reads D sharp—D, while Liszt was satisfied to have the voice remain stationary on the latter tone.

Liszt left us among his songs only four examples of the ballad, a sufficient number, however, to give him a lasting position among the best-known of German ballad composers. The setting of Uhland's *Die Vätergruft* for baritone must be placed side by side with the most powerful ballads of German musical literature. Indeed it is difficult to say who after Löwe has written anything which can be ranked with it. It is of that rare nobility of conception which characterizes also the setting of the Goethe ballad, *Es war ein König in Thule*, and the interpretation of its veiled, sombre mystery should be left to the singer in whom ripe musicianship is coupled with more than ordinary vocal gifts. The music to Heine's well-known ballad *Die Loreley* is in every way worthy of the romantic beauty of the legend and the charm of the poetic text. The remarkably detailed structure of the accompaniment, following each change of mood in the poem and enhancing the effectiveness of the vocal line without either forcing the voice into the background or losing its own unity or importance—this was an artistic achievement which was first accomplished by Liszt, and which has been equalled in manner by but few of his successors. *Die*

Fischerstochter, (Count Coronini), while not equal to the other three ballads, is still worthy of more than passing notice. The naïve motive of the opening bars:



metamorphosed under Liszt's practised hand, is used to picture the storm near the close of the poem:



As to the poets who furnished the inspirations to Liszt's songs, what bards are dearer to the German heart than Goethe, Schiller, Uhland, Lenau, Heine, Freiligrath, Fallersleben, Rückert, Hebbel? Among the lesser lights we find Geibel, Herwegh, Willbrant, Rellstab, Redwitz, and many more. From the French, Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset; from the Hungarian, Horvath.

Of the seven Goethe settings, all save the first two, *Kennst du das Land* and *Es war ein König in Thule*, are pictures of the inner mood. Musicians who are accustomed to look for purely external effect in Liszt and for whom the composer's magic name is immutably linked with the brilliant cadenza and the flashy octave passage will experience more than a mild surprise at the deep intensity of the second setting of *Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass*, or the heavenly calm with which *Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh* is suffused.

Schiller is represented by three songs from his *Wilhelm Tell*. Standing far behind Goethe as lyric poet, his works as a whole offer scant reward to the searcher after song texts. Liszt, however, was as happy in the choice of these three poems as he was in their musical interpretation. As a contrast to the Goethe poems, in the Schiller songs we are transported into the big out-doors, into the midst of the blue skies and the keen, cool air of Alpine highlands. Here there is fine, free landscape painting. All the healthy

joy of life in the boundless open is reflected in the fresh inspiration of these songs, in which Liszt has so delightfully characterized the fisher boy, the herdsman and the Alpine huntsman among the high airs of their native hills.

There are seven Heine songs, among them the well-known texts *Du bist wie eine Blume* and *Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam*. The second setting of the latter, together with the less well-known *Vergiftet sind meine Lieder*, a powerful, passionate utterance, worthy of comparison with Schumann's *Ich grolle nicht*, and *Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen*, a remarkable example of mood-painting, belong among the finest of the Liszt songs. In the last-named composition, helpless despondency is wonderfully pictured through the halting rhythm of the accompaniment and the beginning of the vocal phrases on weak parts of the measure:



With the clever modulation from F sharp to G comes a fresh glimmer of hope reborn:



Rellstab, the Berlin critic and editor, who held sway in affairs musical at the Prussian capital for decades, making himself notorious through his attempts to belittle the compositions of Chopin, would have disappeared almost completely from the ken of man to-day were it not for the fact that some of his lyric poems have found a permanent place in the history of art among the songs of Schubert and Liszt. The author of the verses to the first half of Schubert's *Schwanengesang* furnished also the texts for three of the finest of Liszt's songs, *Es rauschen die Winde*,

Wo weilt er? and *Nimm einen Strahl der Sonne*. The first is certainly one of the most beautiful of all German *Lieder*, and the two others do not rank far behind it. All the melancholy of blighted hope is imaged in this song, an elegy of surpassing beauty. Who would suspect the writer of gorgeously tinseléd operatic fantasies in the following sombre introduction:



or the author of the *Soirées italiennes* in the finely felt musical setting of these two lines:

dolce riten. a piacere.

Ihr blu - mi - gen Au - en, du son - ni - ges Grün, So
wel - ken die Blü - ten des Le - bens da - hin, da - hin.

Liszt found the inspiration to four of his finest vocal fancies among the poems of Hoffmann von Fallersleben. *Lasst mich ruhen* might well deserve a separate analytical monograph. Evanescent phrases of melody, drifting away into softest *pianissimi* like sighs of tenderest remembrances! The accompaniment is one of Liszt's most exquisite inspirations, delicate, and at the same time eloquently expressive. As a tempting morsel, just a measure or two of this delightful creation:

Lento molto

Lasst mich ru - hen, lasst mich träu - men, wo die

sempre dolciss.

A - bend-win - de lin - de säu - seln in den Blü - ten - bau - men

At the close the song wanders away from the E major of the beginning and vanishes dreamily, vaguely, in the far off tonality of G sharp major. The temptation to quote from the other Fallersleben songs is strong, but space will not permit of its indulgence. The reader who takes the time to investigate the charms of *Wie singt die Lerche schön*, *In Liebeslust* and *Ich scheide* will find his pains well repaid, particularly with the last two of the trio. Rarely have those oft-composed words "*Ich liebe dich!*" been given a musical utterance so glowingly passionate as in the song *In Liebeslust*.

Die Drei Zigeuner is Liszt's only Gypsy song. It is strange that he did not write more lyrics on *pusztá* themes, for no one has understood better than he how to portray in tone the Gypsy character with its contradictory mixture of moody melancholy and devil-may-care frivolity. Perhaps the fact that the talents of these children of the sun run more to instrumental than to vocal music may have had something to do with it. But at any rate this setting of Lenau's verses is to be counted among Liszt's master songs. Each of the three ragged figures in the poem is drawn with a musically unerring hand. Horvath's *Isten Veled!* (Farewell!) is the only song of Liszt's after original Hungarian verses. The rhythm has the characteristic Hungarian tang, and the melody is heavy with the sorrow of parting.

The four love songs of Victor Hugo are not German *Lieder* at all, but typical French *romances*, which might almost have come from the pen of Gounod. Liszt is as typically French in these

songs as he is Italian in his *Tarantella* and Hungarian in his *Rhapsodies Hongroises*.

Besides *Die Vätergruft*, the two first *Liebesträume* are also after poems of Uhland, *Hohe Liebe* and *Seliger Tod*. Although the piano transcriptions, which appeared at the same time as the songs, have quite eclipsed the latter in popularity, singers will find these compositions not unworthy of attention in their original cast. Liszt was particularly enamored of the piano arrangements of these songs and had a great predilection for playing them in public at his occasional appearances on the concert stage during the later years of his life. The third *Liebestraum*, after Freiligrath's *O lieb so lang du lieben kannst*, has, in the piano transcription, been played to a sugary death by all keyboard dilettantes in the four quarters of the earth. May it rest in peace!

Of Italian poems Liszt set to music Marchese Cesare Bocella's lullaby *Angiolin dal biondo crin* and numbers 47, 104 and 123 of the Sonnets of Petrarch. These *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca*, like the *Liebesträume*, are better known in the splendid piano transcriptions than in the original. Although these compositions have the charm of Italy in their melodies, they are in fact genuine Lisztian *Lieder* in the manner of their conception and the depth of their musical content. No Italian has turned quite such a phrase as this, from the 104th Sonnet, (for brevity the quotation is from the piano transcription):



This proud threnody may be especially recommended to baritone singers who are capable of its vocal difficulties, the character of the poem forbidding its being sung by the female voice. Of the three sonnets it is the finest. Liszt himself was extraordinarily fond of these songs, and when the piano transcriptions were played in his presence, he was often so affected that he would join in with the player, singing his own warm melodies of the southland with true Italian fervor.

In looking over the list of the *Lieder* there are three other songs which it would be hardly fair to pass by without individual notice. *Es muss ein Wunderbares sein* is the most popular of all

the Liszt songs, a really exquisite creation, simple in contour, unpretentious, almost Schubertesque in execution, wonderfully perfect in balance and not overdone by a single note or *nuance*. One must be musically *blasé*, past all hope of recovery, if this song awakens no response. *Wieder möcht ich dir begegnen* is a charming example of the poetic gifts of Peter Cornelius, to whom Liszt was also indebted for the excellent German translations of the Petrarch Sonnets and three of the Victor Hugo songs. These verses, finely conceived and finely executed, inspired one of the most delicately beautiful of all the songs of Liszt. Again, *Die stille Wasserrose* (Geibel) is a composition of which it is difficult to speak save in superlatives. It is one of the most precious pearls of the entire German *Lieder*-literature, one which alone would be sufficient to place its creator among the immortals of song composition. Of what ineffable grace is the soft, lilting accompaniment, over which is then spun a melody of singularly tender beauty!



What wonderful finesse of workmanship each new measure unfolds and what delicate mysticism lies in the closing bars:

O Blu - me, weis-se Blu - me,

kannst du das Lied ver-stehn?

rit. molto dolce pp

Singers who know only the Schumann setting of this poem will, I feel confident, find an even finer interpretation of its beauty in the Liszt composition.

Among the sixty odd songs which represent the extent of Liszt's activities as *Lieder* composer, there are numerous others whose originality and striking beauty would call for individual discussion, did space permit. It must be left to the reader to make their acquaintance and discover their beauties for himself.

The greater number of the songs appeared in print in the year 1860. There is little reliable information as to the date of composition of many of the songs, but most of them belong doubtless to the forties, some to the fifties, and a few to later years. *Angiolin dal biondo crin* is probably the earliest of the published songs, having been composed at Geneva for Liszt's first daughter, Blandine, who was born in the Swiss town in December, 1835. The *Sonnets of Petrarch* date in their original form from 1838, though they were revised and reissued at a later time. From the three happy summers, 1841, '42, and '43, spent on the island of Nonnenwerth in the midst of the legends of the Rhine, date the Heine songs, most of the Goethe songs, *Nonnenwerth*, the Hugo romances, which seem like echoes of the Paris days, and probably some of the other songs. Those two splendid efforts, *Tristesse* and *Ich möchte hingehn*, belong to the year 1844, the latter having been composed just after Liszt's meeting in the little town of Pau (after many years of separation) with his youthful love, Countess Caroline St. Cricq, now Madame d'Artigaux. *Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen* was written in 1856, the two Müller songs in 1857, *Ich scheide* and *Die drei Zigeuner* in 1860. The three *Liebesträume*, in their original form, were doubtless earlier works. They first appeared in print in 1850. In spite of the glowing youthful enthusiasm of many of the compositions, they are the work of the musician ripe in years as in experience. It may be that during the Paris years, in the first flush of youth, Liszt tried his hand more than once at song composing, but if such were the case, these early efforts have quite disappeared, and it is certain that Liszt would not have wished to have such works placed beside the product of his ripened genius.

The songs in the third volume of the complete edition, (Kahnt, Leipzig), beginning with the Hungarian *Isten veled!* were of later composition, with the exception of the last of the list, *Tristesse*. They were all published in 1878, except *Verlassen*, which appeared in 1880, and was therefore the last song which

Liszt gave to the public. With one or two notable exceptions these later songs will not bear comparison with the earlier works, either as to text or musical setting. One of Liszt's finest traits of character was a never-failing gratefulness to anyone to whom he felt himself in the slightest degree indebted, even for a passing pleasure or a momentary sign of distinction, and it is doubtless on this account that a number of his later *Lieder* are set to the verses of aristocratic dilettantes and mediocre poetasters, from whose efforts in rhyme extraordinary musical inspiration could hardly be expected. As exceptions may be noted *Isten veled! Die tote Nachtigall* and *Bist du!* while in *Der Glückliche* there is a complete return to the power of former days, a flaming outburst of passion, of pulsating youthful emotion. *Gebet, Sei still, Ihr Glocken von Marling* and *Verlassen* are steeped in that spirit of religious contemplation which took deeper and deeper hold on Liszt during the last years of his life, and which was not particularly propitious to the fertility of his musical inspiration. They are exceedingly primitive in character, bare of any sort of ornament and melodically and otherwise of little interest to anyone who is not able to place himself in a like mental condition to that of the composer. The musical depiction of grief, otherwise one of Liszt's strongest sides, degenerates in these songs into the maudlin.

The following songs were arranged with orchestral accompaniment by Liszt himself: *Kennst du das Land, Die Loreley, Es war ein König in Thule, Der Fischerknabe, Der Hirt, Der Alpenjäger, Die drei Zigeuner* and *Die Vätergruft*, the last-named arrangement being the final work which Liszt brought to paper before his death in Bayreuth in 1886. Quite a number of the other accompaniments have been orchestrated by Felix Mottl and Wilhelm Höhne.

For the benefit of that class of musicians who like to imagine Liszt the composer as a completely distanced musical personality, let me quote a word of Hans Richter's on the subject, uttered not so long ago in Bayreuth. "You will see", he said with conviction, "we will *have* to come back to Liszt."

For anyone who has not achieved an appreciation of Liszt's larger and more serious compositions in his musical youth, such an appreciation in later musical life is to a very large degree an acquired taste. Of Brahms the same may be said, while there are other composers, such as Chopin and Schubert, who easily win the sympathies of the musically inclined at almost any period of life. For those who are accustomed to associate the name of Liszt principally with a series of exceedingly brilliant Hungarian

Rhapsodies for the piano, it is a long way indeed to the *Bénédiction de Dieu*, the B minor Sonata and the *Faust Symphony*. The *Lieder*, however, while they belong unmistakably to Liszt's most serious compositions, are not so difficult of appreciation as many of the instrumental works, and are now, some two generations and more after their composition, hardly out of the reach of any musical person who will take the trouble to become acquainted with them. Such trouble will reward the searcher with the discovery of a veritable horde of the most delectable musical treasure.